



Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management Project

George Washington and Jefferson National Forests

The Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management Project is the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests' first-ever large landscape and integrated resource planning effort. The project plan describes restoration activities on 117,500 acres of public and private lands.

Key Project Considerations

The George Washington Forest Plan provides information to guide putting the Forest Plan into practice. Two of the most important aspects of implementing the forest plan are monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation provide information to determine whether programs and projects are meeting forest plan direction and whether the plan should be amended or revised. In addition to forest-wide monitoring, monitoring of project actions (implementation monitoring) also occurs to ensure that various aspects of the project adhere to the standards of the forest plan, the applicable State Best Management Practices, and conform to project specific mitigation measures set forth in the Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management Project EA (LCRMP).

Monitoring will also occur to verify the accuracy of the predicted effects disclosed in the LCRMP Environmental Analysis (EA). Appendix C and Appendix M of the LCRMP EA gives guidance on communication tools to be used with the public.

Due to the collaborative nature of the project development, we will conduct a minimum of one public monitoring trip annually with the public prior to, and throughout implementation of the activities within the LCRMP project. We will also provide a biannual Lower Cowpasture Project Update. Please refer to the LCRMP project website for maps and updates to Appendix M:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gwj/home/?cid=STELPRDB5420614>

Letter from District Ranger

Hello All:

This is an exciting time for the Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management Project (LCRMP)! After all the hard work and long hours of planning, discussing and deciding the future of this area, it is finally time to implement. Seeing the vision on paper come to life on the ground is a magical time. As projects are implemented, we will work with partners to monitor, listen and learn.

The goal of this landscape-scale analysis design is to:



- 1) consider resource management in a more integrated manner and over a longer timeframe (ten years);
- 2) utilize scientific and technological advances to address resource issues at a larger scale (around 117,000 acres); and
- 3) build upon the collaborative relationships that developed among a diverse set of publics during the recent revision process of the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the George Washington National Forest (GWNF).

We have completed this analysis. Now the work begins.



I welcome your feedback. Please share your thoughts with me as we move forward.

Elizabeth McNichols
District Ranger

Implementation Current Events

<p>Walton Tract Fish and Wildlife Habitat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fish and wildlife habitat emphasis for the Lower Cowpasture Project Area focused on converting hay fields at the Walton Tract from cool season grasses to a mixture of native grasses, forbs and wildflowers. This took place on 20 acres of existing fields. In addition, non-native invasive trees (ailanthus) were treated with herbicide injection, autumn olive was brushed back from field edges and future prescribed burns lines were brushed and prepared for burning in the next dormant season. New access gates were installed and access was improved through roadside clearing and road grading throughout the Walton Tract.  <p><i>Converted hay field on Walton Tract</i></p>  <p><i>Planting a wildlife clearing.</i></p>
<p>Aquatic, Riparian and Watershed Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of area watersheds continues including water quality and macroinvertebrate sampling in areas of the Porters Mill Timber Sale as well as traditional quarterly samples from Virginia Trout Sensitivity Study sites. Breeding bird surveys were performed as randomly chosen point counts by The Nature Conservancy and traditional bird routes were run at North Branch of Simpsons Creek, Mill Mountain, Fore Mountain, and Beards Mountain.
<p>Ecosystem Restoration – Vegetation Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 timber sales were sold in Fiscal Year 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Porters Mill timber sale consists of 10 harvest units totaling 267 acres and 6503 hundred cubic feet of volume. Road work has begun on FR194 Lime Kiln Road from SR 629 to FR1901. FR1901 road work has begun to access Payment Unit 3, the first unit to be cut on this timber sale. The Beards Mountain timber sale was recently sold and consists of 10 harvest units totaling 237 acres and 4242 hundred cubic feet of volume. Purchaser has not given us a timeframe for starting this work. Planned timber sale units planned for Fiscal Year 2017 are Lime Kiln and McGraw Hollow.

Implementation Current Events (continued)

Ecosystem Restoration – Silviculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 timber stand improvement units were awarded under a contract and work is slated to begin in fall/winter of 2016/2017. This work involves releasing desirable crop trees, primarily oak species, in young stands.
Ecosystem Restoration - Wildlife Habitat, Forest Health and Silviculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The American Chestnut progeny planting is planned to occur in either fall 2016 or spring 2017 in cooperation with the American Chestnut Foundation. This work involves planting hybrid chestnut seedlings in order to establish a blight resistant chestnut. American Chestnut was once a dominant tree species in the Appalachian Mountains but was decimated by the chestnut blight in the early 20th century. This planting may help us to understand which families of hybrid chestnut perform best against the chestnut blight.
Ecosystem Restoration - Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In June 2016, a group of researchers visited the Lower Cowpasture project area to take pre-harvest measurements concerning research of biomass harvest. These researchers will study the environmental effects of harvesting small diameter woody biomass from regeneration harvested timber units. The researchers will return to collect more data as biomass harvests occur. Soil impacts will be studied.
Ecosystem Restoration - Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In spring 2016, The Nature Conservancy and GWJNF contracted Wildland Restoration International to provide a 4-person module of highly trained fire management staff to assist with preparations and implementation of upcoming controlled burns. The module helped prepare firelines for two units in the Lower Cowpasture project area, the 121-acre Walton Tract unit and the 2,363-acre North Short unit.  <p><i>Wildland Restoration International fire module assists the GWJNF with a controlled burn. Credit James Pilsmaier/WRI</i></p>
Ecosystem Restoration - Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In July, partners in the Central Appalachians Fire Learning Network sampled 14 permanent fire effects monitoring plots in the North Short burn unit. The team followed the unified forest structure and composition monitoring protocol employed by the GWJNF, The Nature Conservancy, VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and VA Department of Conservation and Recreation. Data collected for what was the 6th year post-burn included canopy cover, overstory DBH, midstory and understory woody stem densities, groundcover metrics, non-native invasive species cover (if present) and photo monitoring. North Short was scheduled for its 3rd entry burn in spring 2016, but due to the wet weather, will be postponed until spring 2017. Upcoming potential burns: Walton Tract: October 2016, 50 to 121 acres; North Short Mt: Spring 2017, 2018 to 2363 acres.  <p><i>Photo from monitoring event in the North Short burn unit in 2009.</i></p>

Where Are We Now?



Stakeholders sample regenerating vegetation in Mares Run Vegetation Management Project harvest unit. Credit Marek Smith/TNC

On December 15, 2015, shortly before the Lower Cowpasture Decision Notice was signed, a small group of stakeholders visited the Mares Run Vegetation Management Project and the Warm Springs Mountain Restoration Project, both located within the Lower Cowpasture project area but implemented under separate, prior decisions. The stakeholders, mainly interested in evaluating potential habitat for ruffed grouse, casually sampled woody stem densities and species composition in several post-treatment shelterwood with reserve harvest units and controlled burn units.



Sampling of regenerating vegetation in Mares Run Vegetation Management Project harvest unit. Credit Marek Smith/TNC

On March 29, 2016, eighteen members of the public and agency staff toured the Porters Mill sale area, the first timber sale to be marked as part of the Lower Cowpasture Restoration & Management Project. Participants visited three harvest units and compared different marking methodologies for the shelterwood with reserves treatments, including leaving the residual basal area in clumps or as scattered individuals. The field trip was organized by the GWNF Stakeholder Collaborative and coordinated with the Warm Springs and James River Ranger Districts.

Photos: Participants in the Porters Mill sale area field trip. Credit Lynn Cameron/Friends of Shenandoah Mountain

